

THE GULL



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON SOCIETY // VOL. 98 NO. 4 FALL 2013

FIELD TRIP LEADERS AMBASSADORS FOR BIRD CONSERVATION

BY ILANA DEBARE

The very first issue of *The Gull* carried a report on a field trip. Nine eager birders showed up for Golden Gate Audubon Society's December 1919 trip to Lake Lagunitas in Marin, where they sighted 35 species including scaup, two kinds of kinglets, and a "willow woodpecker." Today, instead of one monthly trip with a handful of people, GGAAS sponsors more than 120 trips each year that draw

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Young Western Bluebirds at Berkeley's San Pablo Park.

GOOD SUMMER FOR TERNS, BLUEBIRDS, GGAS

BY MIKE LYNES, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As autumn begins in the Bay Area, we are grateful that the past breeding season was a successful one for many local species.

In Alameda, the endangered California Least Terns bounced back after a catastrophic year in 2012, in which the colony produced only one recorded fledgling. While we don't yet have final numbers for 2013, all reports indicate that the season was extremely successful thanks to active management by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Navy, and the volunteers of TernWatch, led by our own Friends of the Alameda Wildlife Reserve.

Meanwhile, Western Bluebirds thrived

in San Pablo Park in Berkeley, thanks to a nest box installed by GGAS volunteer Rusty Scalf. And around the bay, we're hearing more reports each year of Osprey breeding successfully, despite once having been extirpated from this area. GGAS volunteers are working with partner organizations to install Osprey nesting platforms to encourage the species' success and reduce human-Osprey conflicts.

Golden Gate Audubon's staff had a productive summer as well. We continued restoration projects in San Francisco and Oakland and participated in the national Audubon Convention in July. We worked hard to prevent backsliding on permits

for wind operations in the Altamont Pass. Thanks to GGAS vigilance, one Altamont wind company was prevented from weakening its permits and doing away with much-needed mitigation measures.

GGAS members worked wonders this summer too! Our community stepped up to meet a \$20,000 challenge gift from an anonymous donor. Joining together, small and large donors put us over our goal—generating more than \$40,000 for our conservation and education programs.

Now, as fall progresses, we're enjoying the return of millions of migratory shorebirds and waterfowl to the bay. Our Eco-Education program is busy bringing students and their families out into nature. Our volunteer docents—including the Burrowing Owl and Birding the Bay Trail docents—are sharing the joy of birding with thousands of Bay Area residents.

Fall is also the time of year to think about renewing your membership in Golden Gate Audubon for 2014. Look for an Early Bird renewal letter in the mail soon. And please remember us as you plan your end-of-year giving.

Golden Gate Audubon exists to represent and serve its members, which we cannot do without your participation. Join us for our conservation committee meetings, docent programs, monthly speaker series, or weekly bird walks, or by continuing to support us.

Thank you and enjoy fall migration!

Additional photographs of Berkeley's Western Bluebirds by Elaine Miller Bond appear with her article on the bluebirds at berkeleyside.com/tag/elaine-miller-bond.

NEWS BRIEFS

Travel with Golden Gate Audubon

We're offering our widest array of guided birding tours ever in 2013–14—Belize, Oaxaca, Brazil, New Mexico, Texas, Alaska, Wisconsin, and more. Sign up now before trips fill up. For details, see goldengateaudubon.org/field-trips/travel-with-golden-gate-audubon.

Recently on Our Blog

If you haven't been reading our blog, you've missed articles such as "A Cooper's Hawk in the Bedroom," "Fighting for Wildlife at Sharp Park," and a review of *Birds of the Sierra Nevada*. Go to goldengateaudubon.org/blog. Click on the "follow" box to receive future posts by email.

Lights Out for Birds

Seven large San Francisco municipal buildings that account for a majority of city departments agreed to turn lights off from dawn to dusk, to avoid distracting and harming migrating birds. Get your workplace to take part in our campaign! Download posters and fact sheets at goldengateaudubon.org/lightsout.

Manage Your GGAS Account Online

Now you can renew your membership, update your contact info, view past donations, or sign up for events like the Christmas Bird Count online at goldengateaudubon.org/login. Note that you'll need to create a log-in name and password if you don't have one already.



Alberto Fox

SAUSAL CREEK

BY PATRICIA BACCHETTI AND MARK RAUZON

The riparian canopy beckons neotropical migrants to breed.

Flowing from Joaquin Miller Park in the East Bay hills to the Oakland estuary, Sausal Creek was long confined to concrete channels, with its tree canopies cloaked in ivy. In 1996, volunteers from the newly formed Friends of Sausal Creek (FOSC), together with the City of Oakland, began to liberate the creek along its run through Dimond Canyon. Thousands of cubic yards of invasive plants were removed, and local-to-the-watershed natives were added to the creek's banks and its tributaries in the hills. The creek now hosts an increasing list of breeding and migrant birds, currently at 120 species.

The most developed part of the restored creek bank, Dimond Park along Park Boulevard, is becoming a reliable area for breeding riparian species and migrants in spring and fall. Cooper's Hawks have nested across the creek from the Tot Lot. Warbling Vireos, Pacific-slope Flycatchers, and Wilson's Warblers breed here as well. Townsend's and Black-throated Gray Warblers pass through in fall, Bullock's and Hooded Orioles in spring. Lincoln's and Fox Sparrows and Varied Thrush are present in winter.

The creek enters the bay at the Fruitvale Bridge, where Peregrine Falcons have nested for several years.

During the winter, you can observe numerous species from Fruitvale Bridge Park: Surf Scoters and other diving ducks, Clark's and Western Grebes, Double-crested Cormorants, Brown Pelicans, and Caspian and Forster's Terns.

Friends of Sausal Creek has collected quarterly data from 10 sites along the watershed for more than a decade, making it one of the East Bay's longest-running bird surveys. The 10-minute point-count method—all seen and heard birds recorded from a single spot and entered into eBird—shows some trends already.

We have made Dimond Park safe for Spotted Towhees and Song Sparrows, but as the vegetation matures and fire concerns grow, undergrowth must be removed, and cover for sparrows is affected. Another trend is the creeping domination of corvids, including Steller's Jays and Common Ravens. We have built a riparian canopy that beckons neotropical migrants to breed, but see the impact of cowbird parasitism due to habitat fragmentation. Yet with a healthy creek and a restored population of native Rainbow Trout, Black-crowned Night-Herons and Belted Kingfishers are new visitors, with others sure to arrive in the coming seasons.

For a longer, more detailed version of this article, including a map of the creek, go to goldengateaudubon.org/blog.



Mark Rauzon/rauzon.com

Clockwise from top left: Sausal Creek near Mountain Boulevard, a spot to find Pacific Wren and wintering thrushes; Common Yellowthroat; White-throated Sparrow, an occasional winter visitor.

Have a favorite birding site you'd like to share? Contact idebare@goldengateaudubon.org.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS ARE AROUND THE CORNER

December will soon be upon us, bringing the 114th season of Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs). So collect your birding friends and sign up for Golden Gate Audubon's two CBCs: Sunday, December 15, for the Oakland count and Friday, December 27, for the San Francisco count. Then get ready for two enjoyable, productive days of birding, with celebratory dinners afterward.

"The last few years, most people have signed up online," says Oakland CBC co-compiler Dave Quady, "and we really appreciate that. Online sign-up will be even easier this year, with separate pages for Oakland and San Francisco, and the ability to sign up for the dinner as well as for the count itself." CBC pages will go live on the GGAS website about October 15, and we hope you'll sign up early. Early sign-ups really help compilers ensure that every count area is covered well.

A Christmas Bird Count aims to identify and count all the birds within its defined 15-mile-diameter circle. Both of GGAS's CBC circles include a wide variety of habitats, so each count typically records well over 150 species on count day. Count circles are split into several areas, most having the same leader for many years. "We rely on our veteran area leaders and participants," Dave says, "but we also welcome newcomers and less experienced birders to the count. We'll do our best to assign you to an area that suits your interests and abilities, and to place you with your friends if you request that. You can bird from dawn to dusk if you wish—and go owling, too!—or count for only a few hours in your yard or in a local park."

Count dinners are a wonderful way to wind down from a day of birding. You can reminisce over the day, visit with friends, and learn where the good birds were found, all while enjoying a tasty, affordable dinner. Everyone is invited: field bird counters, yard watchers, and anyone else who wants to join the fun. Volunteers to help decorate, set up, serve, and clean up at dinner are especially welcome! Please email nweeden@goldengateaudubon.org if you can help.

Ready to count? If so, in mid-October visit the Golden Gate Audubon home page at goldengateaudubon.org. Act promptly! Sign-up deadline for the Oakland count and dinner is November 24; for the San Francisco count and dinner, it's December 9.



Top: CBC birders at Oakland's Arrowhead Marsh. Above: Counting by bike during the San Francisco CBC.

Iliana DeBare

For further information on the Oakland count, please call Dave Quady at 510.704.9353 or Bob Lewis at 510.845.5001; for the San Francisco count, please contact Alan Hopkins or Siobhan Ruck at sfbirdcount@yahoo.com or call Alan at 415.664.0983. Contact the GGAS office on Tuesdays or Wednesdays (510.843.2222) if you need assistance or want more information.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Honoring Dan Murphy San Francisco Saturday, November 2

Join us at a reception honoring Dan Murphy, longtime Golden Gate Audubon Society leader and winner of our 2013 Elsie Roemer Conservation Award. Drinks and desserts will be served from 7 to 9 p.m. at a private San Francisco location. For details on the celebration, RSVP to mlynes@goldengateaudubon.org.

Birding by Boat North Bay Saturday, November 16

Join Dolphin Charters and field trip leader Bob Lewis for an all-day cruise from Berkeley to San Pablo Bay, home to thousands of wintering birds, including grebes, waterfowl, loons, and gulls. \$85 for GGAS members, \$95 for nonmembers. For more information and to sign up, go to goldengateaudubon.org/northbay.

Restore Bird Habitat San Francisco and Oakland October–November

Have fun while making a difference for birds! Volunteer at our monthly work days at Pier 94 in San Francisco (Saturdays, October 5, November 2, and December 7) or at MLK Jr. Regional Shoreline in Oakland (Saturdays, October 19, November 16, and December 21). For details, see goldengateaudubon.org/volunteer.

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thousands of participants.

The engine behind all those trips is Golden Gate Audubon's volunteer field trip leaders—more than 60 expert birders who put in well over 500 hours of unpaid work each year.

"Field trips have been at the heart of Golden Gate Audubon's mission from the very start," says GGAS Executive Director Mike Lynes. "And field trip leaders are our best ambassadors—for Audubon, for birding, and for Bay Area bird conservation."

What does it take to be a good field trip leader? Bird identification skills, of course. But more than that, trip leaders need to know the broader natural history of the area they're covering. They also need patience. And on top of that enthusiasm, plus an ability to engage people.

"You need to have expertise but come across as a learner," says Helen McKenna, who has co-led trips with Allan Ridley in Golden Gate Park for 16 years. "We encourage people to help us spot, so it's more a collective experience than someone being led around and shown things."

"A good field trip leader is a bit of an entertainer," says Ginny Marshall, who started out as a participant in Helen and Allan's Golden Gate Park trip and today co-leads it with them. "He or she is good at spotting birds and willing to be patient with all questions. I was a teacher for a while, and I think that helps me."



Martha Wessitsh (center, with field guide) leading a trip at Point Reyes.



GGAS field trip at the Point Reyes National Seashore.

"One field trip is worth hours and hours of sitting at home with online resources." —Jon Sieker

Field trip leaders often bring decades of familiarity with a particular site. Then they typically go out and scout the location in the days before their trip, to determine which birds are currently present.

"We were told in trip leader training, 'Don't lead a trip anywhere you haven't been,'" says Alan Kaplan, who guides two trips each month in Tilden Regional Park and other East Bay sites. "I'd amend that to say, 'Don't go anywhere you haven't been recently.'"

The result is trips that both inspire novice birders and deepen the skills of experienced birders. "One field trip is worth hours and hours of sitting at home with online resources," says Jon Sieker, a new San Francisco birder who joined the Telegraph Hill field trip over the summer.

This year, Golden Gate Audubon is experimenting with a new way to develop the next generation of field trip leaders—a Master Birder class co-sponsored with the California Academy of Sciences.

Twenty birders were accepted into the

rigorous year-long program, which involves monthly classes at the academy, field trips, written assignments, and community service. Participants get to examine the skins of birds in the academy's voluminous collection to learn more about bird anatomy and subtle species distinctions.

Oakland resident Mary Krentz is taking the Master Birder class—which she calls "fabulous"—and led her first field trip, to the East Bay's Mitchell Canyon, in May.

"It was scary," Krentz says. "I wondered, 'Are there going to be enough birds to talk about? What if I ID something wrong?' But people seemed happy with it. And what was great was that there were four or five participants who had never been on a trip before."

You can find a calendar of upcoming field trips at goldengateaudubon.org. You can also request a list of upcoming trips by email each month. Contact idebare@goldengateaudubon.org to receive the field trip e-newsletter. GGAS hopes to offer the Master Birder class again in 2014.



Doug Bell with a Golden Eagle.

Joe DiDonato

GOLDEN EAGLES OF THE EAST BAY

DOUGLAS A. BELL

LOCATION / DATE

San Francisco
Thursday, October 17
7 p.m. refreshments
7:30 p.m. program

The San Francisco–East Bay area still harbors one of the densest nesting populations of Golden Eagles in the world. Yet all is not well. Aside from development pressure putting the squeeze on eagle habitat, wind farm operations at the Altamont Pass Wind Resource Area account for a high eagle mortality rate that is unsustainable. In essence, the Altamont represents a population sink to our local eagles. Doug Bell will provide an overview of the Golden Eagles nesting in the East Bay and discuss efforts currently under way to better understand this population and to lessen the impacts of wind energy production on eagles. The latter will include studies incorporating flight behavior and digital elevation mapping to inform wind turbine siting, as well as preliminary results from GPS satellite tracking of local eagles.

Early in his life, Doug Bell discovered birds and, soon thereafter, raptors. He is the wildlife program manager for the East Bay Regional Park District. His research currently focuses on the sustainability of Golden Eagles and other raptors. Doug received his PhD from UC Berkeley. He is an adjunct professor at California State University Sacramento and a research associate of the California Academy of Sciences.

EARLY BIRD RENEWAL

Renew your GGAS membership now for 2014! You should receive a membership renewal packet in the mail soon. Or save time and renew online now at goldengateaudubon.org/join.

Benefits of being a GGAS member include continued issues of our updated, full-color *Gull*; delivery of our monthly field trip e-newsletter; free admission to our Speaker Series; discounts on birding classes and pelagic birding trips; and (new this year) discounted subscriptions to *Bay Nature* magazine. And of course... knowing you are part of a community that cares about and works to protect Bay Area birds!

RENEWABLE ENERGY AND BIRDS

GARRY GEORGE

LOCATION / DATE

Berkeley
Thursday, November 21
7 p.m. refreshments
7:30 p.m. program

California leads the United States in a renewable energy policy that drives large-scale wind, solar, and geothermal projects in our state in windy areas and the desert and on thermal resources.

We also lead the nation in using new technology to avoid, minimize, and reduce conflicts with birds thanks to Golden Gate Audubon and the four other Bay Area chapters that took on finding solutions to the fatalities caused by the turbines at the Alameda County Altamont Pass Wind Resource Area. Audubon's policy is to avoid future Altamonts by siting projects right. Find out how Audubon California is making this happen through efforts to plan conservation of species and habitat concurrent with planning for renewable energy development.

Garry George is renewable energy director and chapter network director of Audubon California based in Los Angeles. He came to the state program in 2008 after six years as a volunteer, board member, and then executive director of Los Angeles Audubon, and four years of service on the Audubon California board representing the Southern California chapters. He is working or has worked with more than 20 chapters in California on renewable energy projects.



San Francisco: First Unitarian Universalist Church and Center, 1187 Franklin Street (at Geary). Public transit, street parking, and parking in a lot for a fee are available. Directions: Visit www.uusf.org/visitors_faq.html, and use the Map It! link on the left.

Berkeley: Northbrae Community Church, 941 The Alameda (between Solano and Marin). Directions: www.northbrae.org/directions.html.

2014 BIRDS OF THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA CALENDAR

Our 2013 photo wall calendar was such a success that we're doing it again! A benefit for Golden Gate Audubon, the 2014 calendar features stunning bird photos by 28 of the region's best wildlife photographers, including Steve Zamek, whose Black-necked Stilts are on the calendar cover.

The calendar makes a wonderful holiday gift for anyone who loves nature. Supply is limited, so order yours now. Calendars are available for \$20 at the GGAS office and at our speaker events, or order them securely online at goldengateaudubon.org/store.



DONATIONS

Thank you for your generous donations to support our many conservation, education, and member activities!

Donations from June 1, 2013, through August 31, 2013

GOLDEN EAGLE

\$1000 or more

Anonymous (3), Jean Conner, John Dang, Alan Kaplan, Matthew Latimer, Melissa Grush, and Molly Latimer, Helen McKenna and Allan Ridley, Miles and Mary Ellen McKey, Mary Price, Marjorie Randolph, Sue Schoening, The Bard Family

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(\$500 to \$999)

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Charles Denson

Chestnut-backed Chickadee.

GIFTS IN HONOR OF

Juli Chamberlin, in honor of Dave Quady
Mike Hall, in honor of Dave Quady
Bob Lewis, in honor of Noreen Weeden and Eddie Bartley
Wendy Naruo, in honor of Dave Quady
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Linda Vallee
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Recology
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NORTHERN CALIFORNIA BIRD BOX

415.681.7422

The Golden Gate Audubon Society was founded January 25, 1917, and became a chapter of National Audubon in 1948. Golden Gate Audubon Supporting Membership is \$35 per year. Renewals should be sent to the Golden Gate Audubon office. The board of directors meets six times per year (schedule can be obtained from the office).

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**3 Bay Area Hotspot:
Sausal Creek, Oakland**

Discover a hidden gem that runs from the hills to SF Bay waters.

4 Christmas Counts Fast Approaching

Don't miss this year's counts in Oakland and San Francisco. Signing up online is easier than ever.

6 Speaker Series:

October in San Francisco: Golden Eagles in the East Bay. November in Berkeley: Renewable energy and birds.

BACKYARD BIRDER



Denise Wight

Rock Wren.

10 TIPS ON HOW TO START BIRDING BY EAR

BY DENISE WIGHT

- 1. Learn to listen.** While birding, be still and remain silent for a minute or two. Begin attentive listening to the bird sounds around you. Try to stay focused on individual sounds. Repeat often.
- 2. If you can, *watch* a bird as it sings or calls.** Observe a vocalizing bird for as long as possible. Be aware of the habitat, season, time of day, smells, etc. Let the entire experience burn new pathways of memory in your brain.
- 3. Start with the common birds.** Get to know the vocalizations of House Finch, chickadee, Mourning Dove, and additional birds you encounter regularly.

4. Record the sound. Even the faintest sound recorded on a cell phone will help you recall the bird's vocalization. Add comments at the end of the recording if possible.

5. Use various techniques to recall bird sounds. Try mnemonics, silly phrases, or line drawings, or record yourself making the call! If "Chicago" prompts you to think "California Quail," use it. Most of all, *use what works for you!*

6. Go out with someone who knows bird sounds. Join a GGAS field trip or take classes. You'll learn much faster. Ask questions, take notes, even ask the leaders what tricks they use to recall the sounds you hear. This may also be an opportunity to find out just what bird species you may be missing due to hearing loss.

7. Consulting apps and recordings. This can be helpful, but try to listen to the real bird in the field for as long as possible before you listen to recordings. They often sound similar, but sometimes they don't, for various reasons.

8. Use additional information. Check books and online resources. Many links are on my website, denisewightbirds.com.

9. Take a look at sonograms (also called spectrograms). They are bit advanced, but are a great way to visualize bird sounds. Check out xeno-canto.org or macaulaylibrary.org.

10. Just get out and listen! Go out as often as you can, in different locations, weather, time of day, time of year. Listen with a joyful heart and without fear. Develop the desire to learn, practice often, and stick with it. Learning to identify birds by ear can be very slow, but you will be rewarded.

Denise Wight, a biological technician for Condor Country Consulting in Martinez, teaches the popular birding by ear classes for Golden Gate Audubon. Her fall class is filled; check the GGAS website for classes that begin in winter.